



Penguins and Golden Calves: Icons and Idols in Antarctica and Other Unexpected Places

Madeleine L'Engle , Leif Enger (Foreword by)

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Despite protests and warnings from friends and family, author Madeleine L'Engle, at the age of seventy-four, embarked on a rafting trip to Antarctica. Her journey through the startling beauty of the continent led her to write *Penguins and Golden Calves*, a captivating discussion of how opening oneself up to icons, or everyday “windows to God,” leads to the development of a rich and deeply spiritual faith.

Here, L'Engle explains how ordinary things such as family, words, the Bible, heaven, and even penguins can become such windows. She also shows how such a window becomes an idol—a penguin becomes a “golden calf”—when we see it as a reflection of itself instead of God.

With delightful language, insightful metaphor, and personal stories, L'Engle brings readers to a deeper understanding of themselves, their faith, and the presence of God in their daily lives.

Penguins and Golden Calves: Icons and Idols in Antarctica and Other Unexpected Places Details

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Author : Madeleine L'Engle , Leif Enger (Foreword by)

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From Reader Review Penguins and Golden Calves: Icons and Idols in Antarctica and Other Unexpected Places for online ebook

Kim Patton says

This title is very misleading. The book was largely philosophical and theological in nature. I did enjoy the plunging of my mind into deeper concepts and interesting, thought provoking subjects. I really respected her wise opinions and observations. The theology confused me, but that's pretty normal for me! I definitely want to read more non-fiction from her because she is an important literary author.

RuthAnn says

I chose Penguins and Golden Calves for a re-read because my Bible study group is studying Exodus this spring, and I knew we'd get to the golden calf story eventually. I didn't remember a lot about this book, but I knew I had read it before. Apparently, based on the inscription on my copy, my mom gave me this book for my birthday in 2006, and I'm guessing that was the first and only time I've read it! And yet, I think because I'm so familiar and steeped in Madeleine's writing, it all felt known and comforting to me. There are also parts of this book from when Madeleine visited Antarctica that inspired Troubling a Star, so those passages felt even more recognizable and cozy. But the biggest thing that stood out for me as I re-read this book was how weird Madeleine's writing about faith can be.

In this book, Madeleine focuses on the dichotomy of icons and idols: icons are objects that symbolize something about God and help us hold to it, but they shouldn't become God. Throughout the book, she goes back and forth between discussing icons and idols in all kinds of contexts. She touches on church services, the arts, war, family relationships, and friendships. It's wandery. I am a very structured person, so it's outside my norm to like books that are looser, but I mean, it's my quirky Aunt Madeleine. She draws me out of my rigid, robot life, even as I kick and grasp to hold on to it. It works out in the end, because her view is always broader and more vivid and more challenging than mine would be naturally. That said, I remembered how easy it is to take an author's words as gospel. I hope that I can hold Madeleine in her proper place as a beloved author and not the end-all-be-all. She is an icon for me of truth and storytelling, but I think it's okay that I don't agree with her about everything.

Connie says

In this book, Madeleine L'Engle shares details about her trip to Antarctica at the age of 74, and the things she learned about the area and penguins while there. She explains why she thinks that penguins and many other things can be icons (windows to God which leads to the development of a rich and deeply spiritual faith) and rounds it out with her feelings about idols (those things that we see as a reflection of themselves and are worshipped that way). I often felt awe at things in nature and an incredible sense of God's creation, so I have to say that I appreciated this observation and others like it. I also feel that she does a wonderful job of explaining why we should be careful that our icons don't become idols.

This was an intriguing look into the thoughts of a writer who is well known for the book, A Wrinkle in Time, one of my childhood favorites. This is also the second book of hers that I have read recently, and I feel it is

worthy of 5 stars.

Maria says

I adore Madeleine L'Engle, but did not realize going in how much this would be a meditation on her Christian faith, and I identified less with this than her other works. I had hoped for more of an antarctic travelogue. I still wish she had written that!

Gail Morris says

this book is not one to be read in one sitting; so I started it and then put it down to think on, and picked it up bit by bit to work my way to the end. Her thoughts on religion vs belief in God are very thought provoking. I especially loved to read when she wrote that Jesus was not poor, he was a carpenter, and his father had been a carpenter, so they were middle class people. I like that because once you understand skilled labor that becomes self evident.

Apryl Anderson says

Idols: an enticing concept, and L'Engle has sussed the situation. I felt as if she was preaching to the choir with this one, and at the same time, she had a decidedly saucy tone, as if she was looking to defend something....

It's pretty obvious that in doing all those writers' workshops and giving talks, she encountered more than her fair share of spite and contention in the name of Jesus. Her rebuttals go from near heresy and back to Biblical, all the time sifting out the lies like chaff until only the grain of truth remains.

Biblical truth? Not entirely, and L'Engle's really playing with fire here. Her view of the Father was so clearly based on her own, that I wonder if she didn't see her bias? If anyone is a genius at spiritual speculation, L'Engle certainly ranks right up there with Lewis & Tolkien.

gigi says

meh.

Sarah says

Thanks to netgalley and Convergent Books for this ARC.

Icon versus idol. This is what L'Engle explores in this exceptional book. I quickly realized I was in more

than capable hands as I delved into potentially complicated text. She skillfully explains some complex theology, but never loses sight of the great Mystery that is the heart of Christianity. And over and over she emphasizes LOVE. This emphasis on love and compassion and reserving judgment for God make Penguins and Golden Calves a timely work, though it was originally published in the '90's. I can only imagine what Mrs. L'Engle would have to say about the current political/social climate. But I bet it would begin with an entreaty for us all (especially Christians!) to love.

Shannon Greene says

L'Engle's thoughts were a little scattered and disjointed at times, making the book hard to follow. However the nuggets of absolute wisdom she provides are worth the read. Even 20 years after it's first publication, this book is so relevant today.

Janelle Lake says

Beautiful application of what points to God and what steers us away without being pious.

Paul says

Madeleine L'Engle, an icon herself, ruminates on iconography and idolatry, the relationship between penguins (icons) and golden calves (idols) and how such particulars have played and worked out in her own writing life story. Preaching to the choir of art, faith, and mystery as well as trying to connect and find common ground with the fundamentalist and literalist crowd. Reflections via ramblings and repetitions. Some really wonderful words of wisdom at times. Where in the world is Antarctica?

Lindsay says

Although this was scattered at a bit ramblly at times, I can't deny how powerful much of its content is (especially the last third). This book was exactly what I needed at this time in my life. I love when that happens.

Gwen says

Not as many penguins as you'd think!

A rambling, sometimes beautiful, sometimes cringe-worthy loose collection of L'Engle's reflections on religion, theology, writing, human nature, and aging.

h/t: Vox

Michelle Kidwell says

Penguins and Golden Calves

Icons and Idols in Antarctica and Other Unexpected Places

by Madeleine L'Engle

Crown Publishing

Convergent Books

Christian

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I am reviewing a copy of Penguins and Golden Calves through Crown Publishing and Netgalley:

When Madeline L'Engle was seventy four she went on a rafting trip to Antarctica, her journey through this beautiful land led her to write Penguins and Golden Calves. This book is a captivating discussion on how opening yourself up to Icons or everyday Icons can become windows to God and can lead to the development of a richer relationship with God!

In this book Madeline L' Engle explains how the ordinary everyday things such as family, friends, words the Bible, Heaven and even Penguins can become symbols but she warns us too that a window can become an idol if we let it, how a Penguin can become a Golden Calf, when we allow it to reflect ourselves and not the good Lord.

I give Penguins and Golden Calves five out of five stars!

Happy Reading!

Erika RS says

This is another of L'Engle's journal-style pieces of non-fiction. The unifying thread of this book is a discussion of the difference between icons and idols and icons L'Engle has found useful in her life.

According to L'Engle, an icon gives greater insight to God. An icon does not have to come from a religious source. L'Engle gives one example of how penguins became an icon for her during her trip to Antarctica. Seeing the highly social but non-intimate penguin communities gave her insight into the difference between intimacy and community.

An idol does not give insight into God. The idol is worshiped for itself. The danger of icons is that they can become idols if one is not careful. L'Engle gives an example of the Bible as icon or idol. The Bible, if one is

a Christian, provides the definitive insight to God. However, if someone ceases to look for God's meaning behind those words (including acknowledging the context and communities where those words were originally given) and instead only pays attention to the literal phrasing of the particular translation they are reading, they have idolized the Bible.

Although L'Engle insists that an icon must provide insight to God, I think that that definition is too limiting. Even outside of a religious context, it is useful to distinguish between something that one admires because it gives insight and something that one worships. The American flag is an icon of the values of the US, but in and of itself it is just a piece of colorful cloth. A wedding ring is symbolic of the promise made in marriage vows, but in and of itself it is just a band of metal. An icon can be a potent reminder of something important, but once the icon become more important than that which it represents, it is an idol.
